

## KnowledgeQuality

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*Wherever ghosts may be appearing,  
The sage finds welcome and a hearing;  
And that his art and favour may elate,  
A dozen new ghosts he'll at once create.  
You'll not gain sense, except you err and stray!  
You'll come to birth? Do it in your own way!*

J. W. v. Goethe [transl. by G. M. Priest]

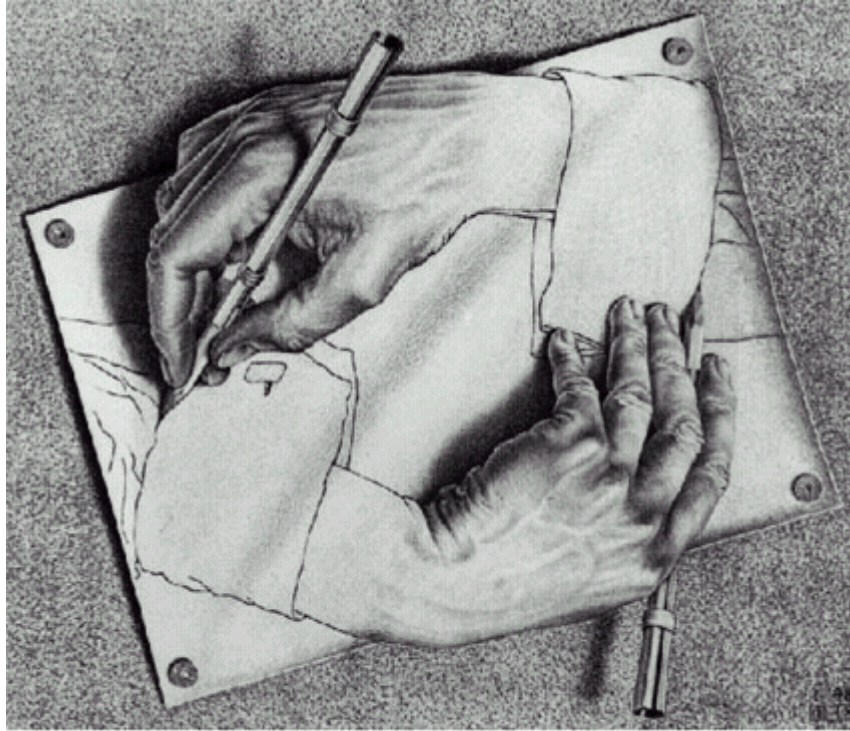
What is knowledge? How can the quality of knowledge be measured or influenced? These questions will scarcely be answered sensibly without consideration of the aspects of ignorance.

The basic problem when dealing with knowledge lies in the fact that the instruments applied themselves consist of knowledge: thus knowledge is defined by knowledge. Progress in understanding knowledge keeps within a narrow frame: apart from the proliferation of categories there are circular definitions (vicious circles), as discussed by Plato in his »Theaitet«,<sup>1</sup> and even paradoxes.

The basic problem can easily be explained by the following image:

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<sup>1</sup> »However the question was not, of what there is knowledge, nor how many different kinds of knowledge there are. For we didn't ask with the intention of enumerating them, but to understand knowledge itself, whatever it may be. [...] If somebody asked us about something completely ordinary, such as the nature of clay, and we answered him that there are different kinds of clay, e.g. for potters, for doll-makers or even for brickworks, wouldn't we make ourselves look ridiculous? [...] First of all, by assuming that the questioner could understand the matter from our answer if we simply repeated: clay - even with the addition: clay for the doll-maker, or any other craftsman. Or do you think somebody might understand the notion of something of which he doesn't know what it is? [...] Thus someone who doesn't know what knowledge is will not understand the knowledge of shoes [...] It is therefore ridiculous to answer the question: what is knowledge? by mentioning some science [...] That is like describing a never-ending way.« [Platon: Theaitet, transl. by Schleiermacher, F., Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1979, S. 17 ff.]



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A hand sketches a hand which sketches this hand and so forth...  
You are in a similar situation if you say: »I am lying.« Are you really lying at that moment or are you telling the truth? (The classical example in this context is the Liar Paradox of the Cretan, Epimenides, who maintains that all Cretans lie.)<sup>2</sup>

According to Wittgenstein,<sup>3</sup> however, the problem can be approached from two sides: in order to define knowledge it is necessary to know both sides of this definition - in other words: one should know what one can't know.

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<sup>2</sup> An example by Russel, which is rather more difficult to understand, concerns the set R of all sets which do not contain themselves as an element. If R is not contained in itself, does R have to be contained in itself?

<sup>3</sup> »For in order to define thinking, we would have to be able to think both sides of this definition (we therefore would have to be able to think the unthinkable).« Ludwig Wittgenstein: Tractatus logico-philosophicus Logisch-philosophische Abhandlung, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989, Vorwort.

My fractal-based view,<sup>4</sup> therefore, mainly illuminates this side of the definition from a pragmatic, knowledge-economical perspective.<sup>5</sup> It will focus on aspects of disinformation with emphasis on the phenomenon of Passive (or Qualitative) Disinformation.

*Basic and reference sources:*

T. R. Glück: Das Letzte Tabu : Blinde Flecken, Passau: Antea, 1997

T. R. Glück: Blinde Flecken in der Unternehmensführung : Desinformation und Wissensqualität, Passau: Antea, 2002

*Internet-Resources:*

<http://www.wissensqualitaet.de>

<http://www.knowledgequality.org>

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<sup>4</sup> The notion »fractal« was originally introduced by the mathematician Benoit Mandelbrot. Mandelbrot uses the term »fractal« to characterise highly complex structures which are generated by the repeated application of astonishingly simple rules.

Fractals can be regarded as dynamic balances. Thus fractal geometry has become the symbol of numerous disciplines which focus on non-linear change.

The fractal perspective of knowledge which is maintained here shows strong analogies to Mandelbrot's conceptual basis, which explains why his term is used.

<sup>5</sup> Economy as »the science of rationality« deals with the phenomenon of shortage. Knowledge is a scarce commodity, especially in view of aspects of disinformation and asymmetries of information.

An early principle of the economy of knowledge is ascribed to Wilhelm von Ockham (1285 to ca. 1349) under the notion of »Occam's razor«: »entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem« (i.e. the number of entities should not be increased above the necessary measure; or alternatively: »entia non sunt multiplicanda sine necessitate«).